

FOCUS ON CHILDREN & FAMILIES



Strasbourg, 7 January 2003

CS-Forum Participation (2003) 3
ENGLISH ONLY

**Working Group on
"Children, Democracy and Participation in Society"**

2nd meeting

28 – 29 November 2002

**Palais de l'Europe
Strasbourg**

MEETING REPORT

*Document prepared by the Secretariat
Directorate General III – Social Cohesion
Social Policy Department*

I. INTRODUCTION

1. The second meeting of the Working Group on Children, Democracy and Participation in Society took place on 28 – 29 November 2002 in Strasbourg. The meeting was opened by the Secretariat who underlined that the main purpose of the meeting was to decide on how to proceed with the material received on the call for information on children's participation in the family, and to select projects to visit from the replies received on the call for information on young children's participation in schools and the local community.
2. The Secretariat, moreover, specially welcomed to the meeting Mr FROSSARD (Switzerland) and Ms MIKALAUŠKAITE (Lithuania) who have replaced Ms MALLIA (Malta) and Ms SWARBRICK (UK) as members of the WG. Ms KRÄNZL-NAGL, the WG's consultant from the European Centre for Social Welfare Policy and Research in Vienna, was also especially welcomed.
3. Before adopting the agenda, the members of the WG as well as the Secretariat informed each other about recent events that had taken place related to children's issues. The agenda was adopted as drawn up by the Secretariat and as shown in Appendix I to this report. The list of participants appears in Appendix II.

II. PARTICIPATION ON CHILDREN IN THE FAMILY AND OTHER LIVING ARRANGEMENTS

4. The consultant informed the meeting that the call for information on material concerning "Children's participation in the family and other living arrangements" had not been successful and gave the WG a brief overview of the few replies received¹. The consultant told the meeting that possible reasons for the small number of replies could be that there still is a **lack of (written) material** on this topic (in some countries it is a very private theme), that calls are very **supply-driven**, that the **distribution** of the call within the countries had not work very well and that the replies to the calls for material related to participation in the family and for projects in schools sometimes seems to be **mixed up** by the respondents.
5. As to the quality of the material received the consultant pointed out that only a small percentage of the material **focused on the topic** of the call, that the material received was very **heterogeneous**, that the categories of outputs (bibliographical references) of searches in literature databases were **different**, that only very few responders had filled in the **form** and that most of the publications/bibliographical references were written in **national languages**.
6. Against this background the consultant underlined that it was not possible to produce an inventory/bibliography.
7. The members of the WG noted with disappointment the poor result of the call, and recognised that despite the fact that the call had been spread quite widely, it had not sufficiently reached the scientific community in the member States. The fact that the call was only sent out in English and in French, and that it asked for quite a lot of

¹ Only 9 of the 44 member states of the CoE replied to the call

information may also have lead to fewer replies. It was, however, pointed out by the WG that the few replies received could also be looked upon as a result. It is a fact that there does not exist much research in this regard (as research traditionally has tended to focus on the general situation of children and not on the role of children) and this “result” should therefore serve as an encouragement for research on children’s role in the family.

8. The WG went on to discuss whether a second call/reminder should be sent out, but taken into account the time schedule foreseen for the work in 2003 as well as the problems mentioned in paragraph 5 this strategy did not seem feasible. The WG also discussed and decided against further search for information via Internet or adding as an additional task for the consultant the analysis of data of the Young Voices Project (UNICEF).

9. In conclusion it was decided that the consultant in accordance with paragraph 1.1 b) of contract No. 28/2002 would prepare a summary report of the findings with conclusions (procedure undertaken/ what happened/ result/ what went wrong/ why/ what lessons can be learned etc.). The result of the bibliography search would be appended to this report. The draft report should be submitted to the Secretariat by the end of the year, and would be sent to the WG for comments before it was finalised. Lastly, and based on the poor result of the call it was decided that the consultant would not produce the planned inventory/bibliography.

III. PARTICIPATION OF CHILDREN IN SCHOOLS AND THE LOCAL COMMUNITY

Consultation of children

10. The members of the WG reported on how they had consulted (or not consulted) children when preparing their shortlist of projects to visit. Written reports (extracts) from Ms CHRISTIAN (Austria), Mr ISMAYILOV (Azerbaijan), Ms VESTBY (Norway) and Ms NUNES DE ALMEIDA (Portugal) describing the consultation of children can be found in Appendix III to this report.

11. Generally speaking the WG found that the consultation of children had proven very problematic and adult centred, and as a result not all members of the WG felt that it was possible or correct to consult children in their selection of projects. It was pointed out that the projects were written in a typical “adult –language” which in its form and content was totally inappropriate for consultation of young children. The WG pointed out that the simple fact that the material received was written in English or French created a decisive obstacle for direct and not filtered access to the information for a child speaking a foreign language. It was, moreover, difficult to find ways to keep the attention and interest of these young children when taking about the projects. The project descriptions were made by adults and there was no comments made by children anywhere on how they felt about the projects. Neither was it possible to see if and how children were involved in the selection of the projects running in their schools/community. Another issue raised was how to select the children to consult in this regard.

12. Ms NUNES DE ALMEIDA pointed out that the WG should have included in the call for projects a brief description of the project by a child directly involved in the experience (using drawings, photos, a video film, a text, etc.), where he/she would have explained why the WG should visit the experience he/she participated in, why did he/she liked it... etc... in his/her own words, from his/her point of view. This “child” item could then have formed the basis for the children’s consultation, permitting a child-to-child dialogue.

13. Lastly, it was emphasised and it requires lot of recourses both with regard to knowledge (how to do this correctly in a child-friendly manner), personnel (requires more time for preparation) and money (material has to be translated and get a child-friendly “look”), if children at this young age (5 to 11 years) are to participate seriously in work like this.

Selection of projects to visit

14. Turning to the selection of projects to visit several members of the WG pointed out that it was difficult to select 6 projects among the 68 projects received. It was, however, noted that the WG members had quite similar opinion on which projects to visit (See documents CS-Forum Participation (2002) 5, 6, 7 and 8).

15. The following 6 projects were selected for visits according to criteria set out in document CS-Forum Participation (2002) 3:

- **Children and youth: Empowerment, participation and influence** (1998–2003), Norway (Project No. 35)
- **The school and the assembly**, Portugal (Project No. 38)
- **Quality in schools (Q.I.S)**, Austria (Project No. 6, Example 1 “playground dreams”)
- **Stop child labour in Albania**, Albania (Project No. 1)
- **Conseil Communal Jeunes BRIE (16)**, France (Project No. 29)
- **Playing for real**, United Kingdom (Project No. 55)

16. In addition, the WG listed the following 4 projects as “reserves” in case it is not possible to visit one or more of the selected projects.

- **Ecology and children**, Russian Federation (project No. 42) *substituting for project No. 1*
- **Children’s participation**, Romania (project No. 40) *substituting for project No. 1*
- **Stand up for your opinion**, Austria (project No. 4)
- **Citizen and young people as citizens now**, United Kingdom (project No. 56)

17. The catalogue of projects will be sent to everybody that has sent in projects with thanks from the WG. It was also decided that the Secretariat would make an “Extended list of projects” (a compilation of interesting projects that deserves to be studied more closely, but which can not be visited for budgetary reasons). The following projects have been identified for the “extended list”; Children and young

people as citizens now (project No 56), GridClub (project No 58), Children's Express (project No. 65).

18. In addition it was agreed that the WG members would study the catalogue of projects more closely and inform the Secretariat by the **end of January 2003** which other projects should be included in the "Extended list of projects".

Practical questions with regard to the visits

19. Before any visits are set up the Secretariat will formally notify the co-ordinator of the selected projects about the selection and clarify whether it is possible to undertake study visits.

20. Only two members of the WG as well as the consultant will visit the selected projects. Each study visit should, as a starting point, last for two days (or two nights), but if necessary visits can last longer. Based on geographical locations as well as language skills the WG appointed a co-ordinator for each visit and decided on who goes where. The co-ordinator is, in close co-operation with the Secretariat, responsible for setting up the visit with the local co-ordinator of the projects. The consultant will write the report from each visit. The visits should be carried out during spring/summer 2003. An overview of the selected projects listing the co-ordinators and participants for the various visits can be found in Appendix IV.

How to involve children when visiting projects

21. Taking into account the issues raised in connection with the consultation of children when selecting projects (see paragraphs 10 – 13) the WG agreed that each member of the WG themselves should decide whether or not they would like to have informal consultation with children before visiting projects.

22. Bearing in mind the young age group concerned it was, moreover, decided that the WG members would not bring with them children from the "outside" as co-consultant when visiting projects. However, it was emphasised that talking to children involved in the project should form an essential part of each visit.

How to interview children

23. The consultant underlined that how to interview children very much depended on their age, and offered to prepared individual proposals on how to interview children in the various projects to be visited. The consultant would also send to the members of the WG general material on how to interview children.

24. The WG member expressed deep concern about the language problems that will arise when talking to children in Norway, Portugal (only one from the visiting "team" speaks the national language) as well as Albania (nobody from the visiting team speaks the national language). If possible, an interpreter should participate in the meetings with children in these countries. It was agreed that the Secretariat would look into ways to solve this problem. The Portuguese and the Norwegian representative would also examine whether it is possible to get some assistance in this regards from their Ministries when the visits are carried out.

25. It was also agreed that there should be two rounds of questions to the children in the projects, both to give the children time to reflect upon the questions raised and to ensure that the non-national language speaking member of the team can follow the discussion and give her/his input (if it is not possible to secure an interpreter to participate in the meetings with children) If the project co-ordinator as well as the children agree the conversations with the children could also be taped.

26. Following a lengthy discussion on how to select children to interview when visiting projects it was agreed that the local co-ordinator of the project would be asked to select (based on common criteria set up by the visiting co-ordinator) a group of children (8 – 10) that could be interviewed during the visit.

What to look for when visiting projects

27. Bearing in mind the WG's terms of reference as well as the discussions undertaken in the meeting it was agreed that the consultant would prepare a "checklist" of what to look for/ask about when visiting projects. In addition to a common checklist for all the projects the consultant would also propose individual adjustments or additions for each project. The list would be sent to the WG for comments in January 2003.

IV. FURTHER WORK TO BE UNDERTAKEN BY THE CONSULTANT

27. Thanks to the contribution from the Integrated Project the consultant should be further engaged to undertake the following activities/tasks in 2003:

- prepare a "checklist" for all the visits
- advice on how to interview children in the various projects
- visit 6 projects and write reports from each visit
- Prepare overall conclusions of the findings (following all visits)
- prepare policy recommendations/ a practical guide/ tools for adults working with children and participation (to be defined more specifically based on the terms of reference for the WG as well as on the findings of the visits)

V. NEXT MEETING

28. It was agreed that the next meeting of the WG would take place following all the study visits, tentatively in **September 2003**. The main purpose of this meeting will be to examine the overall conclusions of the findings of the study visit to be prepared by the consultant, and to agree on the format/content of the final product of the WG. In this regard particular attention should be paid to the terms of reference of the WG:

"The result of the working group's work could be:

- an inventory of good practice (with policy recommendations),
- development of working tools/methods on how to get children involved in decision making (e.g. a guide for adults working with children),
- training packages for parents, teachers and others".

AGENDA

1. Opening of the meeting
2. Adoption of the draft agenda
3. Participation of children in the family and other living arrangements
Information from the consultant about the findings following the request for information about material on children's participation in the family, as well as information about the state of play with regard to the preparation of the inventory/bibliography of existing material
4. Participation of children in schools and the local community
Information from the working group members on how consultation of children has taken place
Selection of projects to visit
Discussion on how to involve children when visiting projects
Discussion on how to interview children
Discussion on what to look for when visiting projects
Practical questions with regard to the visits
5. Further work to be undertaken by the working group and/or the consultant
6. Any other business
7. Next meeting

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(Apologised)

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CONSULTATION OF CHILDREN

Ms B. CHRISTIAN (Austria)

...In this case I refer to the conclusion of Ana (Portugal), which I fully share (see pages 12-14).

“I very soon realized that this children’s consultation was very problematic and intrinsically biased, adult centred: the documentation we received, in its form and content, was totally inappropriate for this purpose. The simple fact of being written in English or French is, for an Austrian young child, a decisive obstacle for a direct and not filtered access to information”

All projects were written in a typical “adult –language” not appropriate for children. The projects description was made by adults and there is no comment anywhere made by children concerning how they feel about the projects. In non of the projects I can find a comment on their experience from children involved in these projects and from none of the projects we can see if and how children were involved in the selection of the projects running in their schools – was it a participating-process or did adults choose the projects??

I think we should direct our attention to this point when members of the working group will visit the projects.

According to different circumstances it was not possible to check the projects with children...

Mr I. ISMAYILOV (Azerbaijan)

...please note my comments on consultations with children in selecting the projects:

The were group of children randomly selected from neighbourhood and NGO (scouts) to reflect on submitted projects:

1. Mamedova Hayele, 11 years, F, school no. 248, Baku city
2. Jafarova Shahnaz, 12 years, F, school no. 15, Baku city
3. Mamedova Shekil, 9 years, F, school no. 83, Baku city
4. Yagubov Tabassum, 8 years, M, school no. 220, Masazir village (suburb of Baku)
5. Vugar Ahmedov, 11 years, M, school no. 15, Baku city

In the group facilitator (myself) explained the purpose of the meeting and reasons why is important to consider the projects. Children were confident in the group, since there was introduced a game of balls which helped them to get to know each other and learn the names. Also each of them shared with the group more about themselves, the school they study and interests. Then facilitator started to describe the projects (in

local language). Children had some questions, since there was a need to further explain some terms and make comparisons for understanding. Then children were discussing and imagining their own situation and whether it would be interesting for them or not. Sometimes discussions were transferred to something else and facilitator had to intervene to refocus the group.

Comments:

- It is always fun and pleasure to observe how children are trying to discuss their role in their own environment and how they perceive the problems. Sometimes it was difficult to keep their attention for long time, so frequently there was a need to break to refocus again.
- Children were very excited to express their thoughts and sometime were simply interrupting each other.

Ms G.M. VESTBY (Norway)

.....6 children at 10 – 11 years old (2 boys and 4 girls) met to hear about the projects and to express their opinion about the way of selection. They are pupils in the same class in a public school in Oslo.

First I told them about the Council of Europe: a meeting place for all European countries. My presentation of the projects was a kind of representation; telling them about all kind s of projects and the diversities. I wanted them to get an overview as a picture of this field of participation in society; children are invited to participate in many different ways and are acting in different roles in the processes.

The huge amount of projects, and the experienced difficulty to select only some few (difficult even for us adult persons), led to the decision not to ask them about concrete considerations about each projects. In the beginning, I had planned to ask them about 3 important reasons to choose a project and to write each reason on a post-it, then we afterwards could use these post-its in a kind of categorizing. I left this plan, and the way it went was more a kind of informal talk about the role of children (and: the role of the adults) in this kind of processes. This was what they were most interested in:

The children do think this is important for good projects:

- initiatives raised by children need help to “grow” and the way adult person help them is important
- children have to be treated with respect
- children’s initiative and ideas have to be met with a kind of positive curiosity
- the ideas and the process must not be ruled too much by the adults
- children may very well manage a central role in projects, but they need adult helpers
- the way the results is used or the real impacts of the process is important; it will end up as a negative project if the voices and the opinions of the children are used only as a kind of “democratic demonstration” without any real influence. To listen to children is not so difficult, but to really listen to what they say and to give up some power to realize the intention of an influence of the children, that is much more of a challenge

- situations of “children at risk” did they think about as special projects; differing from that of common democratisation, but they saw it as very important to demonstrate that children can and must be heard about their bad situation (“adult persons do not always know how children do feel the way they are treated, although it is meant as good intention”)....

Ms A. NUNES DE ALMEIDA (Portugal)

....I worked on the selection through several stages. The aim was to follow two principles (often contradictory!) proposed by the CE group: the official criteria “to be taken into account”, my personal view on “children participation in school and local community”; the introduction of a children’s perspective.

I very soon realized that this children’s consultation was very problematic and intrinsically biased, adult-centred: the documentation we received, in its form and content, was totally inappropriate for this purpose. The simple fact of being written in English or French is, for a Portuguese young child, a decisive obstacle for a direct and not filtered access to the information.

I thought that we should have included in our initial “call for proposals” a brief description of the project by a child directly involved in the experience (using draws, photos, a video film, a text, etc.), where he/she would have explained why we should visit the experience he/she participated in, why did he/she liked it... etc... in his/her own words, from his/her point of view. This “child” item should be, now, the basis for the children’s consultation, permitting a child-to-child dialogue.

So I decided to make, first, a pre-selection and a shorter list of projects on my own, using the EC criteria (formal and substantive) and evaluating (from my personal point of views on “participation”) all the documentation received. “My” list was, only then, submitted to children of the same age-range (approx. 11 years): the final ranking is a direct result of their consultation.

As a first experience (and with so many vulnerabilities...), I decided to submit my list to a group of 9 girls (11, 12 years old), friends of one of my daughters (Maria, aged 12). They all live in a suburb of Lisbon, are in a local public school, together on a Year 6 class. They belong to middle-class families.

We had a meeting at home, and we worked together for 2 hours. We all sat on the floor on a circle, I first explained the purpose of my initiative: what’s the Council of Europe (I had the computer on and we looked at the CE homepage – buildings, flags, history, etc...), the Convention On the Rights of Children, the Working Group on Children Participation.

After this general introduction, and after answering their questions, I distributed photocopies of a Portuguese version of my table-list of 8 projects (and with it a beautiful smelling pink pen...). I translated the title, the target group, a very brief description of the project. We opened, in the National Geographic site (www.nationalgeographic.com), the maps of the corresponding countries and tried to figure out where they were in Europe. One by one, we then read the information on

each project. I asked them to vote for each of them (they preferred the 0-20 scale), having in mind our need to take a decision on “which project shall we visit?”. After this “quantitative evaluation”, I asked them to write down the name of their “favourite project” and the reason why this was so...

The day after, I distributed the final table (put in an envelope having each of their names) with the results of their voting. I also formally thanked each of them for their participation.

I was surprised with some of their choices:

- a) they put in a second plan projects concerning participation through the media – e.g. school or local newspapers, l'émission TV. I asked them why: they insisted they already had this at their school, it is not new, it is “good, but not very special”;
- b) they were very concerned with “working children” and the situation of those countries which only recently have become democracies (e.g.: Albania). A child at work is something intolerable, and sometimes this is a public discussion in Portugal too. “I think it's important children feel good and free, without thinking of work. They should know their rights and be encouraged to pass over their fears and problems that their families don't know, are not able or don't want to solve” (Monica, 11y). “I think it is very important to disseminate information on this project, because this is a way of informing people of what is happening and this is already half way to stop children's work” (Maria, 12y). “Children have the right to play” (Susana, 11y).
- c) they were very enthusiastic about the Norwegian experiences of children participation in defining “children areas” in a community” (which was foreseeable...). “I think it is very important that children feel good in their town!” (Isabel, 12y). “I think children should decide, not only adults!” (Inês, 11y). But they also considered “traditional”,
- d) institutional political participation (in the Parliament, in a municipality) a crucial issue. I was surprised with this concern. “Children should express their own views, not only adults” (Inês, 11y). “It is very important that children can give their opinion: the country and the city can improve” (Rita, 11y). “There are many people who don't agree with what parties decide, so children should be able to give their opinion” (Susana, 11y).
- e) I was impressed with their empathy with the Belarussian experience: they seemed concerned with violence in school between pairs and the importance to feel “safe” with the help of the older pupils and by means of periodic meetings. “I think young pupils sometimes feel unsafe and don't want to say it. They have the right to feel happy in school” (Isabel, 12y). “It is very important to have a place to express our opinions in school” (Susana, 11y).
- f) I was amused with their indifference towards “the politically correct”... The second position of Portugal in the final ranking didn't cause them any discomfort. “Why? They should come and visit us!” (Bárbara, 11y).

After children's consultation – their ranking...The final selection....

Country, name of the project
1. Norway, Children and youth: empowerment, participation and influence – county of Vestfold
2. Portugal, The school and the Assembly
3. Belarus, Voluntary school service “Voice of Ombudsman”
3. Albania, Stop child labour
5. France, Conseil Communal Jeunes BRIE
6. Austria, quality in schools (p.31)
7. Belgium, une école ouverte à la communication
8. UK, Children's Express UK

APPENDIX IV

1. **Norway: Children and Youth: Empowerment, participation and influence**
 Place: Tønsberg, County of Vestfold (about 2 hours from Oslo - the closest airport is probably Sandefjord)
 Co-ordinator: Guri-Mette Vestby (Norway)
 Participants: Audra Mikalauskaite (Lithuania) & consultant (R. Kränzl-Nagl)
 Working language: Norwegian/English (we need to ask for interpretation)

2. **Austria: "Q.I.S. - Quality in Schools"**
 Place: VS Eisbach-Rein (Styria, near to Graz, the capital city of Styria)
 Co-ordinator: Bettina Christian (Austria)
 Participants: Stanislas Frossard (Switzerland) & consultant (R. Kränzl-Nagl)
 Working language: German

3. **France: "Conseil Comunal de Jeunes BRIE"**
 Place: Brie (in the East of France; Brie - Charentes);
 Co-ordinator: Stanislas Frossard (Switzerland)
 Participants: Ana Nunes de Almeida (Portugal) & consultant (Ulrike Zartler)
 Working language: French

4. **Portugal: "The School and the Assembly"**
 Place: Lisboa
 Co-ordinator: Ana Nunes de Almeida (Portugal)
 Participants: Guri-Mette Vestby (Norway) & consultant (Renate Kränzl-Nagl)
 Working Language: Portuguese/English (we need to ask for interpretation)
 Remarks: visit in summer (July 2003), 3 days (?!)

5. **United Kingdom: "Playing for Real"**
 Place: Devon, Devonshire (in the South of UK)
 Co-ordinator: Audra Mikalauskaite (Lithuania),
 Participants: Ibrahim Ismayilov (Azerbaijan) & consultant (Ulrike Zartler);
 Working language: English

6. **Albania: "Stop Child Labour"**
 Place: Tirana
 Co-ordinator: Velina Todorova (Bulgaria)
 Participants: Ibrahim Ismayilov (Azerbaijan) & consultant (R. Kränzl-Nagl)
 Working language: ?? / English (We need to ask for interpretation)